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Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook by Alan Dundes

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BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

DUNDES, ALAN, editor. *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook*. (Garland Folklore Casebooks, Volume 3) New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982. Xvii+311 pp. Hardcover US \$39.00 ISBN 0-8240-9295-3 (Paperback reissue by Wildman Press, 1983. US \$12.95).

The volume under review is the third of a series, of which Professor Dundes is likewise general editor, designed to present samplings of the scholarship on individual topics of interest to folklorists. The topic here, of interest also to many who are not trained folklorists, is AT tale type 510A and its near relations. The principal matter of the volume is the three classic European tellings of the story (Basile, Perrault, Grimm), followed by eighteen essays, comparative and interpretive, several of which include translations or summaries of non-European versions.

The editor stresses the necessity for a cosmopolitan approach by students of folklore; at times one cannot help wishing that cosmopolitanism here had extended to the proofreading and typography. (The selection by Basile is badly presented: some students, surely, will be puzzled in trying to distinguish Basile's introduction, which is multi-layered, from Dundes's prefatory remarks. Spaces were left in R. D. Jameson's "Cinederella in China" for Chinese characters, but no one remembered to fill them in, although the characters could have been photocopied easily enough from Jameson's original volume.)

The earliest of the essays was first published in 1879, while two seem to have been written especially for the occasion and a third, "The Study of the Cinedrella Cycle" presented by the late Archer Taylor at a congress in Bucharest in 1969, is also published here for the first time. The story of the discovery of Taylor's manuscript is related by Dundes with the earnestness which only those scholars can muster in whose eyes the recent history of their field of study is a concern all but inseparable from its subject matter.

The editor warns that the essays present "variety in the degree of sophistication" (i.e. quality); the selection seems rather to emphasize the variety. One essay that should be of value to scholars both within and outside of the field of folklore study is the superb "Hanchi: A Kannada Cinderella," by A. K. Ramanujan. Ramanujan's description of his approach deserves to be quoted. It is to regard the tale:

"not merely as the variant of a tale-type, a cultural object, a psychological witness (or symptom), etc., but primarily as an *aesthetic* work. I believe that, in such tales, the aesthetic is the first and the experienced dimension, through which ethos and worldview are revealed. The other kinds of meanings (psychological, social, etc.) are created, and carried, by the primary, experiential, aesthetic forms and meanings" (p. 260, italics in the original).

The principle that a work of literary (or any other) art must be understood as an aesthetic whole, that it cannot "mean things other than itself unless it first means itself in its totality, is one that all who engage in interpretation would do well to remem-

ber. The volume include other selections almost equally admirable; there are also some that are weak or even silly, presumably chosen for their monitory value.

In keeping with what one presumes to be the volume's intended use in the classroom, Dundes has furnished prefatory comments on each selection, thus providing bibliographical and background information and guiding the fledgling folklorist as to the merits and demerits of the methods represented by the individual essays. The bibliography is invaluable; the guidance is accomplished with conspicuous firmness. Like Ludwig Bemelman's twelve little girls, Dundes has "smiled at the good/ and frowned at the bad." The hero in his dialectic is the "true or complete folklorist [who] is both literary and anthropological" (p. 169; the remark precedes an essay by James Danandjaja devoted to demonstrating the not very surprising proposition that the heroine of a Javanese Cinderella tale embodies personality traits considered desirable in Javanese culture). Those on the other side are "literary scholars, historians, psychiatrists, and others who . . . rarely if ever utilize . . . folkloristic tools of the trade, probably because they are ignorant of their very existence" (p. 148). Elsewhere, this list is expanded to include "armchair critics who from one perspective or another offer a reading of Cinderella. . . . These armchair interpretations tend to be somewhat doctrinaire insofar as anthroposophical, Jungian, or Freudian tenets are shown to be illustrated by details in Cinderella" (p. 193).

I much enjoyed Dundes's scoring these people off—he does a "job" on the Jungians in particular, and if the essay by Marie-Louise von Franz (full of expostulations on the vagueness of women, and with a digression on ski shoes) is at all typical, it is well deserved. On reflection, however, the practice of reproducing work which one disapproves of in order to make fun of it leaves a poor taste. The same remark applies to the inclusion of "The Meaning of the Cinderella Story in the Development of a Little Girl" by the Freudian psychiatrist Ben Rubenstein, much as I agree with Dundes's comments questioning, as male fantasy, the concept of "penis envy." Clearly, whoever allows his essay to be reprinted in a Dundes anthology does so at his peril.

Interpretation is a risky business even when performed by scholars who can claim with more justice to know what they are engaged in and with whom we are more likely to be in sympathy; perhaps it is that any interpretation that falls short of Ramanujan's criteria will be reductionist. A case in point is Dundes's own "'To Love My Father All': A Psychoanalytic Study of the Folktale Source of *King Lear*," in which, with considerable virtuosity, the author attempts to show that the source of the emotional power of Shakespeare's tragedy lies ultimately in the projection of a daughter's desire for an incestuous relationship with her father. The existence of an incest theme in *King Lear* is hardly news, as Dundes admits; whether or not acquainted with the folktale "Love Like Salt" or tale type 510B "The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars" a sensitive reader of the play will recognize presence of the theme. Dundes claims that the novelty of his view is in assigning the desire to the daughter rather than to the father; thus the father's misfortune, taking place almost entirely during the daughter's absence from the stage, is the daughter's fantasy revenge, while her own death is her self-punishment.

But how much does the incest theme really matter in the totality of the play? If we distinguish between crimes considered monstrous and unspeakable, such as incest between mother and son, and those considered monstrous but speakable, it is to the latter category that, for Shakespeare and his near-contemporaries, incest between father and daughter belonged. The subject is discussed explicitly—to be sure, with revulsion—at the beginning of *Pericles*; the threat of such incest hangs over the latter portions of Robert Greene's novella "Pandosto," the source for *The Winter's*

Tale;* the threat offered titillating fillips of plot complication for the ingenuity of romancers and dramatists to work on—it turns up a century after Shakespeare's death in the libretto of Alessandro Scarlatti's opera *Griselda*, for example.

What Dundes fails to explain is how a theme capable of being dealt with so trivially can yet form the kernel of a catastrophe so elemental and complete as that which every reader and viewer experiences in *Lear*. The play is not only about the rupture of sexual order; it is about the rupture of social, political, and even natural order. The question that Dundes has failed to ask himself is not what the play's folkloristic "sources" might be but what claim any "source" can have on the meaning of the finished work of art to which it merely contributes. Perhaps the answer must be different in every case; here, it might be suggested, the power of the play arises at least in part through the very disparity between the slightness of the cause and the violence of the effect—but this is suggestion only. It may be that Dundes is right; nevertheless, I should hesitate to entrust my automobile for repair to a mechanic who did not care to discriminate between the car and its starter.

Despite the reservations stated above about the content and form of *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook*, I profited from reading it. The collection fulfills very adequately its aim of not only providing information but stimulating discussion; the reader leaves it both with a keener appreciation of the successes of folktale scholarship and with a chastened awareness of the pitfalls.

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CLARKSON, ATELIA and GILBERT B. CROSS. *World Folktales. A Scribner Resource Collection*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980. Xiv+450 pp. Appendices, selected bibliography. Paper US \$12.95. ISBN 0-684-16290-3 (Cloth ISBN 0-684-17763-3).

This is a mixed bag of folktales and children's tales, drawn from a variety of countries and ethnic groups, intended for use in classrooms ranging from the elementary school to the university. To be fair, the stories are meant to be retold by elementary school teachers, and not read directly by the pupils, but it should be stressed that elementary education was a major consideration in the compilation of the book.

As a "resource collection" the book is meant to be a source for those interested in comparative folklore studies and cross cultural comparisons of tales. The sixty-six stories are broken into ten basic categories, and each story is followed by a brief essay on its history and major points, then a list of motifs it contains, finally a list of parallel versions in other sources used by the editors.

As noted, the book is made with the student in mind. An appendix includes an essay penned by a bright grader on the topic of comparative folklore as well as guidelines for the assignment of paper topics in the college classroom and a variety of other information concerning the use of folklore in education.

Forty of the sixty-six stories are from either European or North American sources, and another six are the products of minority ethnic groups on the North American continent. Four stories are African (though at least one has been completely retold and is useless as source material), two are Russian, and there are a few stories from

* I am indebted to Joanne Lafler for reminding me of this instance.